X-MEN

TREATMENT

BY

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FADE IN:

A grainy television image. Streams and eddies of blue pixels. From the blur of electronic protoplasm emerge the outlines of a large head, a snub nose. A fluttering of little fingers.

The sonogram freezes. A pair of tiny horns twist like whelks from the unborn child's head. We hear the whine of a printer.

A technician tears off a hard copy image of the horned baby. A man in a suit studies the printout. He smiles. Then he reaches for a phone.

ON A DESERT HIGHWAY

A battered pickup blows past. The driver is a young Latino man, his wife beside him, hugely pregnant, grim and silent with the pain of labor. They race by a gas station hung with X-mas lights. The young man looks in his rear-view. Flashing lights.

An old-fashioned ambulance--a white hearse--is in hot pursuit, siren wailing. The young man desperately tries to coax more speed out of his rattling truck.

The landscape is empty again but for the deserted gas station wasting its light on the desert evening. Twilit mountains loom behind it. Faint strains of "Silent Night" from the office radio. The dust of the two vehicles hangs, motionless.

SOMEWHERE IN THE CANADIAN ROCKIES

Ribbons of diamond dust twist across a white expanse. Gray winter sky, distant black treeline. A figure runs across the waste, naked, bleeding from a dozen wounds, caught in the terrible jaw of the mountains. A small, muscular man, his limbs thatched with black hair.

Forty men in white uniforms, riding forty white maglev pursuit vehicles, like treadless snowmobiles skimming along on a superconducted cushion of force, fan out across the mountainside behind him. They are gaining rapidly on the naked man. Then the lead vehicle slows, and circles around. Its driver points to his helmet, and waves them back.

The man runs, scrabbling across the rocky outcrops, half-mad with pain and his longing to reach the shelter of the trees.

He stops running, sucking in lungfuls of sharp air. The drone of the snowskimmers fades.

The man looks up at the sky, listening. His nostrils flare. For someone in his dire condition his eyes are clear and alert. Soon there is nothing to hear or see but snow and wind. Yet he is alarmed. He begins to run again, toward the treeline, leaving a trail of bright blood. A moment later, we hear the faint thumping of a helicopter.

THE SKY OVER MISSION VIEJO, CALIFORNIA

A police chopper circles lazily over a sea of red-tile roofs. The pilot is wearing a Santa hat. As he makes a pass over a small cul-de-sac we tilt down to see the street below, awash in synthetic cheer: an unofficial but hard-fought yearly contest to out-reindeer, out-elf, and out-Jesus the neighbors.

The home of this year's winners: the Lees. Five thousand dollars' worth of lights and lawn ornaments. A creche scene like the Rat Pack gathered round to adore the infant Liberace.

The Lees' living room. Fabulous plastic tree, mountain of gifts. Irish setter asleep next to a gas fire, at the feet of a pipe-smoking dad, an Asian man, in tweeds, standing by the tree, stringing popcorn. Suddenly he tenses, pulls a Glock 9mm from his shoulder holster, whirls, ready to kill. But it's just his lovely wife, also Asian, carrying a tray of homemade cookies. They both smile. He shakes his head sheepishly as he reholsters the gun. He puts his arm around her and they stand by the window, their perfect mom and dad faces hellish in the light coming from their front lawn.

IN THE HUDSON VALLEY OF NEW YORK

A candle flame swells, throwing its small solemn glow on the face of a young woman with bright red hair. She is lighting the last candle on a tree covered in blazing white tapers. She turns, smiling to the room behind her, where other young people, four men and a woman, all dressed like her in private school blazers and gray trousers or skirts, come and go, setting a dining room table for a feast. We pull back, through the leaded lozenges of the frosty window, away from this grand old house, under its mantle of snow, spilling its warm yellow light onto the fields around it, at the end of a rustic country road called Graymalkin Lane.

IN THE DESERT

The pickup pulls off the desert highway at a stand of cottonwoods, cuts its one headlight. Bumps along toward a distant cluster of lights. The ambulance passes right by.

The pickup pulls up in front of a small collection of trailers. The man leaps out to help his wife down. People emerge from the trailers and gather round. Strangers. An old man helps them into his trailer. Clear liquid streams down the woman's leg, pooling in the sand.

IN THE ROCKIES

The trail of blood leads to the trees. Just before the bleeding man can reach the treeline, a small attack helicopter, ghostly white, swoops in and cuts him off. The man whirls, then spreads his arms wide, defiant, roaring an inarticulate challenge.

Inside the helicopter. A technician withdraws a serum tube from a red biohaz cooler. Quickly, carefully prepares an injection dart, passes it to a sharpshooter, who takes aim and fires.

The dart lodges in the naked man's shoulder. He growls, animal and low. Pulls it out. With a roar he throws himself into the snow, rolling down the slope toward the trees. The helicopter banks and takes off.

The man stands up in the sudden silence. Waits, breathing deep and steady. Nothing happens. The man is puzzled, seems on the verge of smiling, then stiffens. Sniffs the air. Turns. We hear another, different low growl.

The wolves emerge from the trees.

THE LEES' HOUSE

Mr. and Mrs. Lee, expressions blank, stand outside a closed door in their upstairs hall. Oasis poster on the door. Mr. Lee knocks. He calls out, "Honey, are you all right?" A young girl answers, her voice repressing tears and panic, "I'm fine. I just have a really bad headache." "Another one?" Mr. and Mrs. Lee look at each other, faces unreadable. She looks down, then taps his arm. He looks down at the bottom of the door. Weird flashes of colored light: neon, sparklers, flashbulbs. A tiny liquid finger of light reaches out from under the door and burbles between their feet before dissipating. They step aside, strangely unsurprised.

IN THE MANSION DINING ROOM

Six young people sit around the table laden with turkey and trimmings. At the table's head, in a vintage wicker wheelchair, an older man with a clean-shaven pate. He raises his glass of wine, and the young people raise theirs. They toast the season of peace and understanding with unusual feeling. One of the young people, slight, with very dark hair, has his back to us--we can't make out his face.

THE DESERT RAT'S TRAILER

By lantern light an old Indian woman crouches over the supine young mother-to-be, chanting to her. The final work of delivery has begun. The husband and the old man watch, surrounded by several cats, a rooster, and a dog.

IN THE ROCKIES

The seven wolves circle the naked man. Then they come at him. SNIKT! Three long, glinting steely claws thrust out from the back of each of his hands.

He takes a long lateral swipe at the alpha wolf. Three long strands of blood trail his flashing claws. The wolf yelps, then falls. The others press the attack. But the naked man is no longer completely a man.

OUTSIDE THE LEE GIRL'S ROOM

Mr. Lee pounds more urgently on the door. "Jube! Jube!" There is no answer. The light under the door is brighter than ever. He looks at Mrs. Lee, and eyebrow raised. She nods.

AT THE HUDSON VALLEY MANSION

In the living room of the estate. A stylish fellow with ice-blue eyes, a beautiful young black woman with snow white hair, and the slight man who still has his back to us, sit around on couches, listening as the bald-headed man reads A Christmas Carol aloud. Two others, the red-haired woman and a tall, slim, handsome young man, dance to Nat King Cole. A log fire roars in the fireplace. A short, extremely thick-set young man--almost freakishly so--comes in, looking abstracted but worried. He hands a sheet of paper to the bald man, who reads it, looking grave. Hands the paper it to the slim man who has by now stopped dancing. The slim man looks up, puzzled. "Wolverine?"

IN THE ROCKIES

The slashed bodies of six wolves litter the ground. The naked man, his body covered in his own blood and that of his victims, pants, wavers, clearly at the limit of his strength. He and the last wolf lock eyes, animal to animal. The wolf growls. The naked man growls back. It's truly an inhuman sound. At last the wolf turns tail and runs. The man stands triumphant a moment, then collapses into the snow.

IN THE DESERT RAT'S TRAILER

The sound of helicopters and sirens drowns out the old midwife's chanting. Outside, the ambulance scrapes to a halt, as familiar-looking attack helicopters, ghostly white, fill the air overhead. Inside the trailer, panic--all except for the old woman, intent on her work. Sound of automatic gunfire outside. A newborn wails.

The door is kicked in. Men dressed in white body armor fill the doorway, pour in. On their left breast plates, in small Bodoni type, the motto, BREEDING AND FORM. "Step away from the child. Now." The father rushes for the men, is shot down. The lead assassin takes careful aim with a pistol and kills all the adults except for the midwife. He steps over to her, indicating that he wants the child. "It won't be harmed." She gives it, reluctantly. He kills her. Carefully, with a weird tenderness, he passes the baby to a second assassin, who swaddles it and slips a bottle of formula into its mouth. As it begins blindly to suck we see that it has two small curved horns protruding from its brow.

AT THE LEES'

Mr. Lee breaks down the door, rushes in. Almost a parody of a teenage girl's room, frilly and pink--and half destroyed. A young Asian girl lies on her bed, curled into a fetal ball, hands clutching her forehead with one hand, a stuffed monkey with the other. Sparks and colored balls of light flow from her and float like bubbles. Most pop harmlessly but every so often one burns a hole in the wall, or blows the leg off a chair, or melts a lamp. Mr. Lee runs to her and grabs her. His manner is not tender at all. He tosses the monkey aside and we see it's missing one button eye. Mrs. Lee hurries in with a medikit, takes out a syringe. The girl screams, and struggles, "No, no!" PAF! A glob of energy hits the monkey; it vanishes in a sizzle. A smaller one hits Mr. Lee's head. He cries out, and his face wavers weirdly, like a flickering TV image, and in its place, for a fraction of a second, we see a blond man with a hard face. The girl begins to grow hysterical; the needle goes in.

IN THE ROCKIES

The naked man lies where he fell, unconscious, dusted with snow. The wounds on his face have healed. An armored blue boot hits the snow just beside his slumbering head. Other boots appear around him, until he is surrounded by six pairs of armored blue boots. Twelve hands reach down to hoist him into the air.

THE HUDSON VALLEY ESTATE

The man wakes up. He has no idea who or where he is, or how he got there. He bears a barcoded implant bonded to his skull (his body would 'heal' a tattoo): the name Logan, a serial number, the rest encrypted. He finds himself surrounded by friendly, if slightly wary faces. Curious about his surroundings, he asks a few questions. The answers are friendly but evasive. He seems like a pleasant fellow, a little shellshocked, perhaps. There's a spark between him and Jean Grey, our redhead, though something about him clearly troubles her. Her fiancÈe, Scott Summers, seems to dislike him at once. We sense from the first that his arrival has a troubling effect on all of the students of Professor Xavier, on the world they have made for themselves.

IN MISSION VIEJO

Jubilation Lee wakes in her own room, her parents at her bedside looking worried and relieved. Her room is undamaged. It was all a bad fever dream. She is confused and suspicious but tries to hide it, unable to shake the memory of her father's wavering features. Her parents tell her not to worry. A specialist is coming. This has a chilling sound. They leave. She gets out of bed. Holds up a finger, stares at it. It begins to glow, then sparkle. She panics, shakes it out like a match. Picks up her stuffed monkey, rocks, trying to think what to do. Looks at the monkey's face. It has two button eyes. She throws it down. Goes to door and opens it. Hears her parents talking in low ominous whispers. Goes back into her room and makes up her mind; she stuffs some clothes and a few belongings into a knapsack, grabs her rollerblades, and goes out the window. As she skates away, her parents lean out of the window. Her father touches a place on his neck, and his benevolent face wavers and disappears. He is a hard-looking blond man. The mother touches her neck, and her sweet face is supplanted by the face of a pale blond woman. The man looks disgusted. "I'd better call Mr. Montclair."

* * *

From this point we follow two separate stories until they merge. The first story is about how the damaged man with claws and metal bones enters the world of Professor's Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters and tries to puzzle out its mystery. The X-men conceal their true natures from him, as they do from the rest of the world. Logan's manner is mild, baffled, tentative. He gives flashes of his true self (and there is a small matter of those admantium claws). Logan resists all efforts to recover his memory, unconsciously afraid of what he will find, and tries to ingratiate himself, with uneven results, with the X-men. Henry runs a series of medical and genetic tests on him, and comes to realize that somehow Logan has been horribly altered. Life at the Xavier school seems idyllic and sweet but Logan senses something is amiss. Something odd about these people. We meet and get to know the other "Gifted Youngsters" as people, not as superpowered mutants. Then Logan catches a glimpse of Kurt Wagner with his "image inducer" turned off, and the smiling blond German he has befriended turns out to be a blue-skinned, pointy-eared, six-fingered elf-man. He starts spying and when he sees the team training in the Danger Room, their powers fully unleashed, he learns the truth, but doesn't let on.

One night he sneaks into the Danger Room, activates it. His reactions are impaired however--the trauma he has suffered, whatever it was, has caused him to lose touch with his killer self. He is about to be crushed when the Room shuts down. Logan looks up at the observation window. Professor X is there, then gone. The next day no one else seems to know that Logan knows their secret.

The X-men leave to attend a secret conclave of mutants, held in a private club in NYC, Mendel's, that caters to mutants. The US Congress is debating implementation of a Mutant Registration and Control Act, and the loosely associated, fractious mutant leadership has come to debate policy. Logan, uninvited, trails his friends. This is a visually rich scene, a feast of mutants, half Godfather, half Star Wars. It is proposed that a representative group of mutants appear before the Mutant Affairs Committee to testify on behalf of mutants, but as this would involve revealing their identities, and seems chancy at best, the proposal is rejected.

Recent operations by the X-men and other groups attempting to rescue, protect and assist mutants have backfired or gone wrong, resulting in increased hostility toward mutants. Therefore it is furthermore agreed, not without rancor, that with anti-mutant sentiment at a fever pitch, the various groups cease all activities that might attract public notice and disfavor, in the greater long-term interest of mutant welfare. At this point the meeting is disrupted by a Breeding and Form Comittee, a death squad of the mysterous League of Gentlemen. Logan, hoping to prove himself, reveals himself and repels the attack. But in so doing he is injured--he is not himself, can't generate a beserker rage--and his blood sprays several people, among them Jean.

When they get back to the mansion, Logan, healing, asks to be allowed to join them. They're about to accept him, when Henry McCoy enters, and announces that his study of Logan shows that he is carrying a virus that breaks down the DNA of mutants; and that Jean, and possibly others, has now been infected. As far as Hank can tell, they may have a week before Jean starts to die. Logan's healing factor seems to be protecting him, and in fact the virus in his body is far weaker than that in Jean's or in a petri dish; it was so weakened in his body that only by direct contact with his blood could anyone have been infected. Jean, on the other hand, can spread the disease through casual bodily contact. She must quarantine herself, and when this is not practical, encase herself in a telekinetic body-shield. Only Logan will be able to have close contact with her.

Logan is disbelieving; the others regard him with more mistrust than ever, except for Jean--much to Scott's disgust. Suddenly they are interrupted by Kurt, who tells them to come watch a report on CNN about strange happenings in Southern California--amateur video footage of Jubilation Lee, on skates, tearing through a parking lot outside South Coast Plaza mall, trailing involuntary bursts of plasma. The footage, says Henry, has clearly been tampered with. The name stirs something in Logan's memory. "Legacy," he says. "The name of the virus is Legacy." "How do you know?" "I'm not sure.

But that girl has something to do with it." Henry recalls that his old teacher, Harry Lee, who sent him the e-mail message that alerted them to the whereabouts of Logan in the first place, had a daughter of this name. No idea where to find them. and the e-mail was sent via anonymous remailer. Think, they tell Logan. Try to remember. But he's still afraid to probe his past.

Nonetheless he tries to persuade them to go after the girl. Now it's their turn for reluctance. They don't want to violate the pact, in itself a milestone for the hitherto fractious mutant community, break their word, or have another "successful" exploit backfire. Logan berates them for helping to perpetuate the very conditions they claim to want to combat, for being "in the closet". He reminds them how it was when their own powers emerged--how frightened and alone they felt. At last Xavier agrees.

Meanwhile, Jubilation Lee is running. In these scenes with her, we see her horror at what is happening to her, the repulsion that mutants inspire in her. She falls in briefly with a gang of girls who are then all wiped out by a Breeding and Form Committee. Jubilation escapes, and keeps running. She has a recurring memory of being a little girl, dragged by the hand through a teeming street in a Chinatown. She can almost make out the face of the woman pulling her along.

A big white moving van arrives at the house in Mission Viejo. It's the Tidiness Committee, come to deal with the mess that the League operatives, Jubilation's false parents, have made of things. The house is emptied, cleaned, and put up for sale. False Mom and Dad are permanently tidied up.

Wandering the streets of LA's Chinatown, Jubilation is picked up by the police. Tells her story to them, is brought in for psychiatric observation. Learns there are no records of her existence prior to a year before. We see a rage begin to possess her, at the growing realization that her past, her true parents, have been stolen from her. She uses her powers--learning to control them, in spite of herself--to escape, and flees. Returns to her "house." It's abandoned, cleaned out.

In despair she ends up at the Mall, where she runs across a parking lot, trailing plasma--with a Breeding and Form Committee in hot pursuit (the latter to be edited out for television, of course).

Professor Xavier, channelling remotely through Jean (encased in her psi-cordon) and using his cybernetic psionic enhancement device, Cerebro, guides the X-men to Jubilation. They interrupt a nearly successful recapture attempt. Jubilation watches in fascinated horror as these mutants go to work. Logan, weakened by the virus, his reactions dulled, is severely injured while saving her. In the end, though, thanks to him, the rescue succeeds, although there is an eyewitness. This is a problem, given the pact. Jean wipes the memory from the witness's mind, but the strain causes her psi-cordon to lapse, and Bobby Drake is inadvertently infected. He may be condemned to remain in his Iceman form (in which he is not infectious and the virus is slowed) for the remainder of his life. Jubilation, viewing the X-men as a means to find out what has been done to her and who is responsible, agrees to go back with them to the Xavier Mansion.

Jubilation, seeing a kind of paternal figure in Logan, is unwilling to leave his side, and nurses him through a difficult healing. Storm takes a big-sisterly interest in Jubilation and shows her the ropes. Meanwhile Jean Gray is starting to show signs of genetic degradation. At last, recovered, Logan decides to let Professor X help him break the "preconscious block" that is preventing him from accessing his natural identity constructs, and work past or around the "security wipe" that has been performed on his memories.

In the meantime, Henry McCoy is feverishly working on a cure of his own.

Logan is horrified by uncovering memories not only of what was done to him at a facility called the White Farm, but what he did to others, before his "metaforming" and after. He has been a killer all his life, in the service of a world-dominating organization whose existence Professor X has long suspected, the League of Gentleman (see Appendix). He was developed to be a mutant-hunting superagent, codenamed Wolverine, under the Weapon X project. The other X-men, who had been on the verge of accepting Logan, are repelled.

Jubilation learns from Logan that a woman named Dr. Lee worked at the facility, and helped with his programming. He can vaguely remember hearing her voice, saying, "The only salvation is in Jubilation."

Professor X duly scans Jubilation's memory, helping her recover a few more tiny memories of her parents, but finds nothing helpful about the Legacy virus.

Logan, still reeling from revelations about himself and wanting to atone for all he has done, steals the Blackbird and heads for the White Farm. Discovers that Jubilation has tagged along. Unlike him, she wants to learn the truth about herself, and find out who did this to her.

They arrive at the Institute for Modern Animal Husbandry Research in the Canadian Rockies, better known as the White Farm. Operating as a team, they sneak in, but soon afterward Jubilation is captured. She is told by the eminently calm Mr. Montclair, "manager" of the Farm, that her real father, who invented Legacy, and her mother, who worked on the Weapon X project, were both killed for treachery: when they began to suspect that their daughter might be a mutant, they repented of their work, and arranged for her escape. Naturally the attempt failed, and after they were "tidied up," Jubilation was programmed (using techniques her own mother invented) and placed in a setting where her development, if she truly was a mutant, could be monitored.

Wolverine, attempting to rescue Jubilation, is also captured, and returned to his former state--in a stasis tank, hooked by tubes and cables to elaborate machinery. In order to resume his programming, his "preconscious blocks" are completely removed and a few memories return--three specific images of tenderness and love. Maybe he's not a killer after all.

Back at the X-mansion, the team discovers that Logan and Jubilation are gone. Jean and Bobby argue that they should not violate the pact again. The Mutant Liberation Front is threatening to take action against Senator Kelly, sponsor of the Act. Better to let them die than give the MLF an excuse to violate the pact also. Henry will eventually isolate an antigen. They take a vote, and decide to fight. Scott, the great advocate of the pact, casts the deciding vote.

Before they can leave, they discover that Henry has tested his antigen formula on himself, and the result has been to turn him into a true, furred Beast--but true to character he conceals his horror at this result by pretending to be merely amused.

They go after Jubilation and Logan, and in a pitched battle penetrate the heavily guarded compound. They liberate Logan. Searching for information about Jubilation's whereabouts and her role in the Legacy mystery, they come upon incontrovertible evidence that all the tender memories that have started to flood back are false, mere implants and virtual constructions. Nothing can be said for sure about him. He has no idea who he really is.

At this the animal in Logan, so long repressed, that aspect of himself he so feared and resisted, bursts to the fore. He goes into a magnificent, terrible, pure beserker rage, mowing down armored Committeemen, leading the X-men to free Jubilation, who is being held in another part of the complex. The X-men are stunned by the change in Logan. Jubilation is rescued, and at the sight of her, free, in his arms, the awful rage in Logan subsides (though without disappearing). The two severed parts of his nature are reintegrating themselves.

Hank accesses Harry Lee's secret files and discovers that the antigen formula is coded right into Jubilation's DNA. It also emerges that it was Jubilation's mother who implanted the deep memory of Jubilation in Logan's mind, just before she was killed, and that she sabotaged his programming, eventually enabling him to escape. It was Montclair's genius to take advantage of this potential disaster, infecting Wolverine (from the air) with the Legacy virus and then sending the false e-mail message to Beast, alerting him and his fellows to Wolverine's presence.

They come upon the Nursery, where a small number of kidnapped mutant and pre-mutant children were being raised and trained to become Sports of Nature, antimutant mutant agents of whom Wolverine was to be the first. After a battle with the armored Nannies, they are able to save the children, among them an infant with a pair of small, beautiful horns.

In the end, Jubilation is presented with a chance to kill Mr. Montclair--but right in front of his own children, who live with him and his wife in the Manager's Lodge. Logan, his self reintegrated now by his accepting of the "Wolverine" component of his nature, tempered with the love and comradeship he has learned fom the X-men, is able to articulate a true expression of himself and of the existential adventurer's code by which, prior to his mutilation and brainwashing by the League, he had always lived. He persuades Jubilation to let Montclair live; her true parents gave their own lives to keep her from being trained to become a killer like him; she should honor their sacrifice.

They return to the X-mansion. Henry synthesizes the antigen from Lee's formula, and treats Jean and Bobby, who can finally revert to normal form. Jubilation, having surrendered her anger, is now beginning to accept herself as a mutant, to revel in her powers, to live up to her name. Ororo gives Jubilee something she found in the compound: a photo album of Jubilation with her true parents. Logan eyes it enviously. He prepares to leave, to go in search of his true history. Scott tries to persuade him to stay. Maybe he has no idea of where he came from, or what his real name is, or how old he is, but he knows, on a deeper level, who he is--he is Wolverine, a mutant, and an X-man. Logan says he can't live in secrecy, hiding what he is, especially now that he has found himself again. "Yes" says Xavier. "It's time for us to come out of the shadows."

THE SENATE COMMITTEE CHAMBERS

The X-men are there, openly--even Nightcrawler. They have come to testify on behalf of mutants everywhere in opposition to the Mutant Registration Act.

THE END

APPENDIX

On the League of Gentlemen.

From the hidden wars for global domination and ultimate knowledge that raged over the long centuries, fought by secret societies of Illuminati of whom the best known--the Freemasons, the Knights Templar, the Rose + Cross, the Trilateral Commission--are but pale remnants and facades, there emerged a victor: the League of Gentlemen. Its origins are obscure, its methods shadowy, its wealth immense, its power absolute. You work for them; so does a taxi driver in Samarkand. Some say the League rose from the ashes of World War I, in the proliferation of new technologies and systems of control; others that it has been in existence, in one form or another, since Babylon, since Tyre. What is not in dispute is that thanks to the influence of one of its greatest members, Sir Alexander Mackenzie, it has its chief base of operations, known as the Old School, in Western Canada, which owes its entire existence as an independent nation to the League.

For an age the League ruled supreme, without enemies, without opposition, without fear of any threat to its control. Then, in the years that followed the Second World War, there emerged a new, unlooked-for threat, not in the form of a rival cartel or conspiracy, but in that form most threatening to any system of control: pure randomness; in this case, the random, spontaneous mutation of human DNA. Members of what some believed to be a new species of homo had begun to appear: mutants. Sometimes these were merely freakish accidents of genetics, sometimes completely unviable dead ends, and sometimes--this was what worried the League--they were gifted with amazing and wondrous powers. Such randomness and such strength, potentially beyond the reach of law and armies, troubled the sleep of the Gentlemen.

Almost from the moment of the first mutations, League scientists--the vast majority of whom had no idea they were working for the League--became aware of the problem. Their research was quickly focused in two directions, not necessarily compatible: control, and eradication.

In the meantime the League continued to operate against the mutants, with remarkable effectiveness, through largely non-scientific means: using its great media organs and command of the world's lawmakers to demonize and persecute mutants.

In the mid-1970s, on the verge of breakthroughs in certain aspects of antimutant studies, a secret facility was built, in the wilds of northern Alberta. Officially known as the Institute for Modern Animal Husbandry Studies, Department H or the White Farm, as it became known, was the birthplace of the two deadliest products of League research: the Legacy virus, which attacks the chromosomes of mutants, while leaving ordinary humans unaffected; and the "metaformed" mutant known as Wolverine.

Intended to be the first of many anti-mutant mutant agents, Wolverine was to be also the fulfillment of the dream of the shadowy Gentleman known as Mr. Montclair, "manager" of the White Farm. Mistrusting the potentially catastrophic effects of the Legacy virus, he preferred to pursue a course of eradication through control. A team of anti-mutant agents, to be code-named the Sports of Nature, would carry out covert operations around the world, tracking and killing mutants until none remained. These agents must, of course, be mutants themselves, powerful mutants with abilities more than equal to those of their prey; where such could not be found, they must be created. Thus Wolverine.

The man hitherto known only as Logan was an effective operative for the Canadian government who served a number of dangerous missions during which he was severely injured many times. His unusual recuperative abilities and heightened sensory apparatus, clearly the results of mutation, drew him to the attention of Department H just as a test candidate was being sought for Project Weapon-X, the program that would "build" the Sports of Nature. Discharged from the service, captured, and taken to the White Farm, he was subjected to a series of horrifying surgical procedures during which he was provided with a set of retractable adamantium claws, while more adamantium, the hardest metal known, was bonded directly to his skeleton.

At the same time, the Control experts went to work on his mind, breaking down his personality constructs and biochemically manipulating his memories, to bring him under the full direction of the League: a super-soldier, incapable of disobedience, codenamed Wolverine.

Meanwhile, in the eradication division, the brilliant biogenetic engineer Dr. Harry Lee, chief researcher and developer of the Legacy virus, was in the grip of a different horror. Hitherto unconcerned with moral or ethical questions that he considered extraneous to his work, he now had to face the fact that, in inventing Legacy, he had placed a weapon in the hands of murdererers, and that one of the potential victims was his own daughter. Jubilation Lee, then eleven and entering puberty, had started to manifest mutant powers. One day Dr. Lee discovered, by chance, that his daughter's abilities, limited for the moment to the production of a faint luminosity from her fingertips, had not escaped the notice of the Weapon X directorate. She had been marked for monitoring, with an eventual eye toward subjecting her to metaforming and mind-control.

Conferring secretly with his wife, Dr. Flossie Lee, a psychoinformatician assigned to the Control team responsible for Wolverine's memory implants, he made plans to help his daughter escape. While there was no time to effectively synthesize and test it, Harry Lee developed a formula for a Legacy antigen and then hid this message in a very clever bottle: encoded in a strand of junk DNA on his daughter's chromosomes. Once she had escaped, she was to make her way, if she could, to an old student of his who would be able to help: Henry McCoy, a brilliant researcher whom he had always suspected of being a mutant.

The plan was discovered; Jubilation was captured, and her parents killed. Before she died, however, Flossie Lee managed to sabotage the Wolverine's programming, blocking key neurotransmitter paths, and implanting him as well with a deep suggestion that Jubilation held the key to the Legacy virus. The girl, too valuable to kill, was subjected to intensive memory reprogramming, using techniques her own mother had developed, and then "adopted" by League operatives living in Fullerton, California.

During the "involuntary debriefing" of Jubilation, details of the escape plan, including the existence of one Henry McCoy, Ph.D and mutant, were uncovered. Investigations were made, leading the League to learn of the existence--though no more--of the secretive X-men, purported to be a group of super-powered mutants, of whom McCoy was believed to be a member.

A little over a year after the failure of the Lees' plan, during final testing of the Wolverine agent, the removal of certain psycho-controls deemed to be necessary if he were able to operate independently enabled Wolverine, thanks to Flossie Lee's tampering, for the first time to access a remnant of his Logan-self. Sudden consciousness of his current state, of all that had been done to him, induced his first completely free beserker-rage. Amid unbelievable carnage he escaped, and headed off into the snow.

Meanwhile, back at the White Farm, chaos and recriminations. Only one head remained cool--that of Mr. Montclair. Uniquely gifted at making a virtue of necessity (perhaps a mutant power?), he forbid recapture of the Wolverine unit, allowing him to make his way into the woods, ordering only that he be infected by means of a hypodermic dart, with the Legacy virus. He then sent a counterfeit e-mail, via anonymous remailer, to Henry McCoy, Harry Lee's greatest pupil, alerting him that an escaped mutant was in danger and need of help.